

Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr.
Governor

Judith A. Monroe, M.D.
State Health Commissioner



One suicide death is felt by at least six other people. With more than 700 lives in Indiana lost to suicide each year, this means suicide directly impacts at least 4,200 people every year. The suicide rate in Indiana (11.31) is higher than the national rate (10.7). In fact, on average, suicide accounts for nearly twice as many deaths as homicide in Indiana every year.

Suicide is a serious public health problem, but it *is* preventable. The first step in preventing suicide is to identify and understand the risk factors. A risk factor is anything that increases the likelihood that persons will harm themselves. Some groups with an increased risk for suicide include elderly white males, teens, and young adults. In Indiana, almost 10 percent of youth reported attempting suicide within the past 12 months in 2005 (Youth Risk Behavior Survey). Suicide is one of the leading causes of death for youth in Indiana. While many more males die by suicide than females, more females attempt suicide.

As a health care professional, you can sometimes be the first line of defense in preventing a suicide:

Know the signs. Warning signs of suicide can include hopelessness, withdrawal from friends and activities, anxiety, irritability, mood changes, or feeling trapped. Most people who consider suicide want their pain to go away, but do not want to die. Feeling hopeless or having no reason for living or no purpose in life can lead to suicidal thoughts.

Watch for the signals. Remain alert for signals of emotional distress, depression, or suicide in your patients. It is possible your patients could present physical symptoms of depression, like sleep problems, weight loss or gain, or headaches. Risk factors for suicide are many, including mental illness, alcohol or drug abuse, depression, and chronic disease. The breakup of a relationship or death or divorce of a loved one can also precipitate suicidal thinking.

Behaviors of concern include talking about suicide, agitation, uncontrolled anger, dramatic mood changes, withdrawal from activities and social contacts and acting reckless. Changes in sleeping or eating patterns are common. If such behaviors occur, one should consider that suicide may be a possibility.

Refer for help. Show interest and support for a patient who is depressed or suicidal and refer them to a mental health professional. Talk to your patients if they seem depressed, even if that is not the reason they came to see you. Take the opportunity at every medical visit to ask your patients how they are feeling emotionally, as well as physically. Open communication with your patients may give them the opportunity to share feelings that they are afraid to express to friends or relatives. Offer hope that alternatives to suicide are available. Encourage help through crisis intervention telephone lines and from mental health providers.

□ **Epidemiology Resource Center**
2525 N. Shadeland Ave. Suite E3, Indianapolis, IN 46219
317.356.7190 ext. 253

□ **Laboratories**
550 West 16th Street, Suite B, Indianapolis, IN 46202
317.921.5500

□ **Weights & Measures**
2525 N. Shadeland Ave. Suite D3, Indianapolis, IN 46219
317.356.7078 ext. 221



2 North Meridian Street • Indianapolis, IN 46204 • 317.233.1325 • TDD 317.233.5577 • www.statehealth.in.gov

The Indiana State Department of Health supports Indiana's economic prosperity and quality of life by promoting, protecting and providing for the health of Hoosiers in their communities.

Some resources for your patients include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and the 24-hour Crisis Line through the Mental Health Association of Greater Indianapolis at (317) 251-7575 or (317) 251-0005.

Some additional resources that can be accessed online include:

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention – www.afsp.org
- Indiana Suicide Prevention Coalition – www.indianasuicidepreventioncoalition.org
- Mental Health of America of Indiana – www.mentalhealthassociation.com
- Stop A Suicide – www.stopasuicide.org
- Suicide Prevention Action Network USA, Inc. – www.spanusa.org.